



AUXILIARY VERBS AS A RESULT OF CONCEPTUAL METONYMY: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the cognitive mechanisms underlying the development of auxiliary verbs across languages, arguing that conceptual metonymy plays a central role in their grammaticalization. While previous studies have primarily emphasized metaphor as the driving force behind semantic extension, this research demonstrates that metonymy—based on contiguity within the same conceptual domain—provides a more accurate explanation for the emergence of auxiliary and supportive verb constructions. The study analyzes data from Uzbek, English, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese, revealing that auxiliary verbs originate from lexical verbs through systematic metonymic shifts. The findings suggest that the transition from lexical meaning to grammatical function reflects universal cognitive patterns rather than language-specific phenomena.

Keywords: Auxiliary verb formation; conceptual metonymy; grammaticalization pathways; cognitive mechanisms; semantic extension; cross-linguistic typology; event structure.

Introduction

Auxiliary verbs are essential components of grammatical systems and have been widely studied within the framework of grammaticalization (Heine & Kuteva, 2002). Traditionally, their development has been explained through metaphorical extension, where meanings shift across conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, this explanation does not fully account for the semantic continuity observed in many auxiliary constructions.

Recent studies in cognitive linguistics suggest that conceptual metonymy, which operates within a single conceptual domain, plays a crucial role in semantic change



(Radden & Kövecses, 1999). This paper argues that metonymy provides a more adequate explanation for the emergence of auxiliary verbs across languages.

2. Literature Review

Grammaticalization refers to the process by which lexical items develop into grammatical markers (Hopper & Traugott, 2003). Within this framework, verbs often evolve into auxiliaries through semantic bleaching and functional shift (Bybee et al., 1994).

Cognitive linguistics highlights two major mechanisms of semantic change: metaphor and metonymy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Radden & Kövecses, 1999). While metaphor involves cross-domain mapping, metonymy is based on contiguity within a single domain.

Scholars such as Heine (1993) and Traugott (2010) have emphasized that grammaticalization is deeply rooted in human cognition. However, the role of metonymy in auxiliary verb formation has not been sufficiently explored in cross-linguistic studies.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach. Data are drawn from multiple languages, including Uzbek, English, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese. The analysis focuses on identifying semantic shifts from lexical verbs to auxiliary functions and determining whether these shifts are metaphorical or metonymic in nature.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Uzbek

Uzbek auxiliary constructions such as:

- *yoʻzib qoʻydi*
- *aytib yubordi*

demonstrate a shift from concrete action to aspectual meaning. These shifts represent metonymic extensions where one phase of an event stands for the whole (Heine & Kuteva, 2002).



4.2 English

English auxiliary verbs:

- *have* → perfect aspect
- *be* → progressive aspect
- *going to* → future

have been widely discussed in grammaticalization studies (Bybee et al., 1994). While often interpreted metaphorically, these developments can also be understood metonymically as internal extensions of event structure.

4.3 Russian

Russian constructions such as:

- *стал говорить*
- *начал работать*

illustrate aspectual development through lexical verbs, aligning with grammaticalization pathways described by Hopper and Traugott (2003).

4.4 Chinese

Chinese aspect markers:

- 了 (*le*)
- 着 (*zhe*)

originate from lexical sources and develop into grammatical markers through context-based reinterpretation (Bybee et al., 1994).

4.5 Japanese

Japanese constructions:

- *-te iru*
- *-te shimau*

demonstrate grammaticalization through semantic extension within the same domain, consistent with metonymic processes (Heine, 1993).

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that auxiliary verbs emerge through systematic semantic shifts best explained by metonymy. Unlike metaphor, metonymy preserves conceptual



continuity, making it a more precise explanatory tool in many cases (Radden & Kövecses, 1999).

Cross-linguistic evidence supports the universality of this process, suggesting that auxiliary verb formation reflects general cognitive principles rather than language-specific developments.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the central role of conceptual metonymy in the development of auxiliary verbs across languages. The findings contribute to cognitive linguistics and grammaticalization theory by emphasizing the importance of intra-domain semantic shifts.

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